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SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN ELECTION PLANNING (C-AL9-01770)

REF: A. STATE 94259  
[1](#)B. LA PAZ 1285

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires John Creamer for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Per reftel A request, Embassy reports that Bolivian election planning is advancing on all fronts. The registration process for the new biometric electoral roll, managed by the Bolivian National Electoral Court (CNE) is proceeding on schedule and without major obstacles. The CNE is confident of reaching its goal of registering at least 3.5 million Bolivians by October 15, having already registered three million Bolivians with a month to spare. Among the opposition, Manfred Reyes Villa has some momentum, but Samuel Doria Medina still has the support of several Santa Cruz business leaders. Conalde (National Democratic Council) has not endorsed either candidate. End summary.

#### Biometric Electoral Register

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[1](#)2. (C) Despite initial executive branch attempts to derail it, the CNE-administered biometric voter registration process has proceeded smoothly and without major incident. One month before the October 15 deadline to register at least 3.5 million Bolivians (the same number as were registered for the January 25 constitutional referendum), the CNE has told us they are confident of reaching their goal. Separately, Organization of American States (OAS) officials involved in the registration effort predict the final total will be between 4.2 to 4.4 million people. With over three million Bolivians registered and the CNE maintaining a pace of up to 100,000 persons registered daily, it appears the biometric register will reach its goal and perhaps surpass four million (which President Morales opined should be the "true" goal).

[1](#)3. (C) There have been a few reports in the press of violence at registration stations, but these have neither derailed the process nor resulted in serious reported injury. GOB-aligned social groups in the western Altiplano part of the country have threatened to bar opposition candidates from entering local communities, but they have not opposed the arrival of voter registration teams.

#### Opposition Status

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¶4. (C) Despite much discussion of the need for unity, the eastern opposition group Conalde, which is composed of prefects (governors) and civic committees from the eastern departments or Media Luna, has not united around a single candidate. Chuquisaca and Tarija departments support the ticket of Manfred Reyes Villa and Leopoldo Fernandez. Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas, while publicly saying he will not support any candidate, recently blasted Reyes Villa in a television interview for choosing as his campaign manager former La Paz Prefect Jose Luis Paredes, who is widely considered corrupt. Costas privately supported Victor Hugo Cardenas before he left the race. Our sources tell us that after Cardenas' departure, Paredes pushed Costas too hard to support Reyes Villa, and Costas' public criticism is a reaction to Paredes' misguided efforts. The media reports that Beni Prefect Ernesto Suarez supports Reyes Villa, but the department's civic committee has thus far abstained from endorsing any candidate.

¶5. (C) Personal rivalries and differences over electoral strategy also exacerbate division within Conalde. First, Cardenas had courted Conalde strongly before his sudden departure from the race, and while Conalde as a whole did not take a public position, many members supported or leaned toward supporting him. Second, Samuel Doria Medina has had success in his meetings with eastern business leaders, especially in Santa Cruz. Many of these leaders have a natural affinity for Doria Medina's "Putting Bolivia to Work" campaign as well as his reputation as perhaps Bolivia's most successful businessman. Third, Santa Cruz Senator (and Senate President) Oscar Ortiz had thrown in his lot with Cardenas, while Cruceno rival (and cousin) German Antelo sided with Reyes Villa's campaign. When Cardenas exited the race, Ortiz was left to make a deal to campaign with Doria Medina's UN party. This alliance further pulls some eastern leaders to Doria Medina.

¶6. (C) Last, while difficult to confirm, sources say a few influential Crucenos have an altogether different strategy: let Morales win. From their point of view, Morales' policies will ruin the country within two to three years, at which time a majority of the country will turn to a Cruceno (or other eastern department) candidate for a new brand of leadership. Instead of fighting to keep the Senate or act as a brake on the Morales project, they would accelerate it. These leaders are refusing to endorse or finance any candidate.

¶7. (C) We do not have reports of the national opposition campaigns cooperating with each other or with regional parties to coordinate the campaign against Morales. On the contrary, Reyes Villa is still trying to convince Doria Medina to unite with his campaign. Smaller parties, such as Pulso (led by Cochabambino indigenous leader Alejo Veliz) are positioning themselves as an alternative to the larger parties. Pulso Senate candidate Marlene Paredes told Poloff that the GOB will prevent Reyes Villa and Fernandez from finishing the race -- most like through lawsuits, she said -- and that the country will soon find out Doria Medina is in league with the GOB. Rene Joaquin's Alianza Social has not agreed to ally with any of the other parties, leading some to speculate that he is positioning himself more as a candidate for 2014 than for 2009.

¶8. (C) We do not have reports of opposition plans to protest the elections or of attempting fraud. The common wisdom among contacts is that the Media Luna was badly burned in last year's violent protests, which the central government used to garner national and international support. In addition, opposition contacts are still focused on the campaign, especially keeping control of the Senate.

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